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The Commission of Fine Arts
9 May 1956

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Minutes of Meeting of
The Commission of Fine Arts
9 May 1956

The Commission of Fine Arts met, pursuant to notice at 9:30 a.m. with David E. Finley, Chairman, presiding.

Present were: David E. Finley, Chairman
Douglas W. Orr, Vice Chairman
Elbert Peets
Wm. G. Perry
Felix W. de Weldon
Mrs. Emily Muir

L.R. Wilson, Secretary

Date of next meeting

The date for the next meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts was fixed for June 14th, with no meetings scheduled during July and August.

Discussion:

Federal Advisory Commission on the Arts-Letter from Congressman Frank Thompson

The Chairman reminded the members of the correspondence received from Congressman Frank Thompson on the legislation for a Federal Advisory Commission on the Arts, a copy of which had been sent to the members asking for their comments. He also read a copy of a letter which Mrs. Muir had written in reply to Congressman Thompson. In the ensuing discussion, it was pointed out that, of all the bills that had been introduced on this subject, the Commission preferred the provisions of S.3054, having expressed the hope that S.3054 would be enacted. S.3054 would provide for a Federal Advisory Council on the Arts to be a part of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and contained a provision that asserted the independence of the Commission of Fine Arts. It was also favored by the Administration. The Chairman said he would discuss the matter further with Congressman Thompson.

Potomac Crossing at Constitution Avenue, N.W.-Status

The Chairman reported that he had drafted a statement, in anticipation of being called before a Congressional Committee hearing testimony on the problem of deciding to build a bridge or a tunnel at Constitution Avenue. The members asked the Chairman to strengthen the statement by giving it more emphasis to the preservation of the memorials in that area on both sides of the river; and also tp phrase

the text in a way that those in favor of the bridge might be asked to say whether, in their opinion, traffic was more important than preservation of the memorials.

Resolution of American Institute of Architects proposing additional powers for the Commission of Fine Arts

The Chairman drew the attention of the members to the following resolution which had been adopted recently by the Board of the American Institute of Architects:

> "Resolved, That the American Institute of Architects urge the introduction of a bill in Congress requiring the approval of the Fine Arts Commission on plans of all new public structures or major alterations to public structures in the District of Columbia."

The Chairman stated that the Executive Director of the American Institute of Architects, Mr. Edmund Purves, had expressed a desire to come before the Commission of Fine Arts at the next meeting for the purpose of discussing the above resolution. No position was taken on the matter, but it was agreed that a discussion with Mr. Purves would be scheduled for the June meeting of the Commission.

New Executive Order for the Commission of Fine Arts

A revised draft of the proposed Executive Order was read, and, after discussion, was changed in accordance with the text of Exhibit A, which received the general approval of the members. The members asked that steps be taken to effect approval of the text.

Identification of Government Buildings

The Secretary reported that a bill had been introduced by the Honorable Oliver P. Bolton, Congressman from Ohio, proposing that all public buildings should be marked with the name of the agency occupying the building. Congressman Bolton had also written a letter to the Administrator of General Services with reference to this proposal. A meeting had thereupon been arranged in Congressman Bolton's office attended by the Administrator of General Services, the Commissioner of Public Buildings, and the Supervising Architect of General Services Administration, and the Secretary of the Commission of Fine Arts. At this meeting, two methods of solving the problem were discussed, 1) the placing of suitable, raised letters (metal) on the stonework; and 2) the use of a free-standing metal plaque with contrasting letters on a bronze background. The latter method seemed to be the more practical of the two proposals, and it was agreed that a tentative design would be developed for submission to the Commission of Fine Arts for consideration. Exhibits B and C.

Land Use Plan for Square 62

Mr. Charles Conrad, a member of the staff of the National Capital Planning Commission, appeared before the members to explain that an arrangement that had been worked out with the National Association of Life Underwriters and the American Pharmaceutical Association, whereby the proposed Life Underwriters building would be

moved from the corner to the center of the lot directly behind the Pharmaceutical building. The purchase of the laundry property at the northwest corner of the Square had facilitated this agreement. The members agreed this rearrangement would be much better for the individual buildings in this area, especially the addition to the State Department, whose main entrance would have been obscured by the National Association of Life Underwriters building.

Additional Parking for the Postmaster General in the Federal Triangle

The Chairman reported to the members that he had had a visit from two representatives of the Post Office Department who stated they were anxious to work out some arrangement whereby the Postmaster General could enter the building from his car, park it with, perhaps, room for a few additional cars where it would remain on instant call. They stated they would like to have a narrow driveway entering from 12th Street and to use the space in the Exedra facing the Great Plaza. The Commission pointed out that this might be done and only as a temporary convenience and that the Commission was looking forward to the closing of the Great Plaza as a parking lot and, perhaps, the establishment of an underground garage in that area. After further discussion, the members agreed that they could take no definite action until they had conferred with the Commissioner of Public Buildings Service.

Legislation for decoration of public buildings.

The Secretary reported that he had not yet received from the General Services Administration, as joint sponsors of the legislation, a draft of how they thought the bill should read. The Secretary was directed to ask the Commissioner of Public Building Service if he could have a draft of the proposed legislation ready for the next day's meeting.

Proposed Additions to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier-status

The Secretary reported that revised drawings or plans had not been completed in time to present them to the Commission at this meeting.

Proposed Third Division Memorial

The Secretary reported, as a matter of information, that he had several informal visits from Mr. Frederick Winant, a member of the Third Division Memorial Association, regarding a memorial to the Third Division in Washington. He said that Mr. Winant had proposed making the memorial in the form of a small structure on the Ellipse, where it would be possible for people to go and meditate. The members were not enthusiastic about this idea. They suggested that the Third Division should be asked to consider making its memorial in the form of a fountain. The members said they would be glad to advise on a site.

Proposed Memorial to General Pershing

The Secretary pointed out that the American Battle Monuments Commission had announced, in the newspapers, its intention to place a memorial statue of General Pershing in the triangle at Pennsylvania Avenue and Fifteenth Street, Northwest. He stated, further, that, upon inquiry, General North, Secretary, had assured him that any such plan would be submitted to the Commission of Fine Arts and that the question of site had not been settled but only considered at a meeting of the American Battle Monuments Commission. It was also pointed out that legislation had been enacted authorizing the American Battle Monuments Commission to approve the site and design of the memorial to General Pershing, but that he had been assured by General North that they would seek the advice of the Commission on the matter.

Progress on the Southwest Redevelopment Plan

The Secretary called the attention of the members to the fact that the National Capital Planning Commission was going to make a report on the Webb and Knapp proposals for the redevelopment of the southwest area, at a public hearing to be held on May 14, 1956 by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. After a lengthy discussion, the members agreed that the plan, as proposed, was in their opinion, changing and competiting with the L'Enfant Plan. The Chairman was directed to write a letter to the Commissioners for presentation at the hearing, expressing the views of the Commission regarding this very important project. Copy of letter is attached as Exhibit D.

Submissions:

Parking for the Postmaster General

Mr. Cooper, Assistant to the Postmaster General, conferred with the members and told them of the Postmaster General's strong desire to have additional parking spaces provided on the Twelfth Street side of the Post Office Building in the Hemicycle and on the Thirteenth Street side in the Exedra. He stated further that it was his understanding, after a conference with the Chairman, that the Commission might be willing to reconsider its opposition to the request for such parking space, as a temporary expedient, on the Thirteenth Street side, provided that the Postmaster General would support the Commission in taking measures toward eliminating parking in the Great Plaza and developing it as a park in accordance with plans of long-standing. He recalled that the Chairman had suggested it might be possible to have parking facilities constructed under the Great Plaza with a surface suitably landscaped.

Mr. Cooper stated that the principle problem on the Twelfth Street side was a conflict between passenger cars and heavy commercial traffic going into the north court through a very narrow

driveway which could not be widened because of the structure of the building. He reported that there had been many bad accidents to the passenger cars, and the Postmaster General was primarily interested in correcting that situation. He asked for approval to make the driveway around the Hemicycle wide enough to permit cars to stand there temporarily while picking up or discharging officials, and to permit other cars to come in and out in the meantime. After discussion, it was agreed that the driveway could be widened and the existing narrow pedestrian walk eliminated, provided appropriate landscaping would be done around the perimeter of the Hemicycle.

Mr. Cooper stated that the Post Office Department would make no objection to the removal of the temporary parking space for that Department on the Thirteenth Street Side, when a solution is found to the problem of removing the commercial parking from the Great Plaza. The members agreed that the Post Office Department be allowed additional temporary parking space for a period of one year at which time the matter would be reviewed for the purpose of removing the commercial parking and landscaping the Great Plaza. The General Services Administration, who would carry out the changes, had representatives present during this discussion.

Building for the American Pharmaceutical Association

While considering the land use plan for Square 62, Dr. Fischelis, Secretary of the American Pharmaceutical Association, asked the Commission's advice on the type of material to be used in a projected expansion of the existing building. He showed the members a drawing by Eggers and Higgins, which showed new wings of limestone at each side of the central marble building. The Commission's advice was that marble should be used throughout.

Shipstead-Luce Submissions

The following Shipstead Luce submissions were approved:

S-L 1853 - 1013 D Street, N.W., one 25 sq.ft. single faced neon sign with clock;

1854 - 3145 Beach Street, N.W., two story brick and cinder block dwelling;

1855 = 3000 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., one single faced, 12 sq.ft. illuminated sign;

1856 - 300 Sixth Street, N.W., one 25 sq.ft. single faced sign;

1858 - 1005 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. remodel facade and show windows;

1859 - 1003 D Street, N.W. one 24 sq.ft. single faced sign; existing signs to be removed.

The following Shipstead-Luce submissions were disapproved;

S-L 1851 - 305 D Street, N.W., 4 single faced signs;
1852 - 201 Second Street, N.W., one canvas awning;
1857 - 2300 N Street, N.W., one 72½ sq.ft. illuminated roof sign.

Meeting adjourned at 5:15 o'clock.

L.R. Wilson
Secretary

EXECUTIVE ORDER

The citizens of the United States regard their Capital with a specific pride and interest, and the effort to maintain and enhance its dignity, graciousness, and beauty should be unceasing. Further, the Federal Government should be diligent to insure that public buildings and structures, monuments, statues, mural paintings, portraits, coins, postage stamps, and medals, and similar objects, which are created or produced under its direction are of a high degree of artistic merit. In achieving these ends, the Commission of Fine Arts is particularly fitted to assist by reason of its especial competence in aesthetics. Accordingly, pursuant to the Act of May 17, 1910 (36 Stat. 371) and as President of the United States I order as follows:

Section 1. (a) Each officer of the Federal Government or of the District of Columbia who is charged with the responsibility of land use or of constructing, altering or removing facilities or structures within the District of Columbia or its environs, shall submit the plans, including location and site development for such projects to the Commission of Fine Arts for its advice.

(b) Each officer of the Federal Government or of the District of Columbia who is charged with the responsibility of maintaining or establishing a park in the District of Columbia or its environs shall submit all plans for the establishment of a new park or for changes in an existing park to the Commission for its advice.

EXHIBIT A

(c) The word "aesthetics" is considered to extend beyond the meaning of thin veneer of beauty applied from the outside, an orderliness of plan and arrangement which makes for harmony and thus for beauty.

(d) As used in this section, the word "environs" means those areas within 30 miles of the exterior boundaries of the District of Columbia.

Section 2. Each officer of the Federal Government who is charged with the duty of erecting, altering, or removing a statue, fountain, monuments, or similar object, shall submit the plans to the Commission for its advice.

Section 3. Each officer of the Federal Government who is charged with the duty of obtaining or producing medals, insignia, coins, postage stamps, mural paintings and portraits shall submit the designs of such objects to the Commission for its advice.

Section 4. It shall be the duty of the Commission of Fine Arts to offer its advice with reference to the destruction of structures that, in the opinion of the Commission, constitute architectural or historic monuments and that are the property of the Federal or District Governments. It shall also be the duty of the Commission of Fine Arts to call attention of the responsible officers to impending projects that will, in its opinion, be harmful to the appearance of the city.

Section 5. Any project that will result in changes in the L'Enfant Plan shall be submitted to the Commission of Fine Arts for advice before proceeding.

Section 6. All designs for such projects shall be submitted to the Commission at the earliest stage possible.

Section 7. Any officer of the Federal Government may request the Commission's advice respecting the artistic aspects of any structure, facility, or object for the construction or procurement of which he is responsible.

The White House

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Public Buildings Service
Washington 25, D.C.

MAY 4 1956

Honorable Oliver P. Bolton
House of Representatives
Washington 25, D. C.

Re: Identification of
Government Buildings

Dear Mr. Bolton:

Your letter of April 21 reported a need for marking the Government buildings in Washington and requested that study be given to the matter of determining a prominent and uniform system of marking the buildings so that they can be readily identified by visitors to the city.

The meeting with you in your office on April 30, attended by Mr. Charles A. Peters, Director, Buildings Management, and Mr. L. L. Hunter, Supervising Architect, of this office, and Mr. Linton R. Wilson, Secretary, Fine Arts Commission, explored the various methods that might be followed in finding a suitable solution. It was pointed out that the necessity for moving the various departments and agencies from one building to another in order to meet their changing needs and also to secure the best utilization of space makes it undesirable in most instances to carve the name of the agency in permanent letters on the building.

Two methods of solving the problem were considered. One would consist of placing suitable raised metal letters on the stonework and the other would employ a metal plaque with contrasting letters on a bronze background. The latter seemed to meet most of the needs and could be used most easily where departments are moved about or where several agencies occupy a single building.

It was agreed that a tentative design for a suitable plaque or other device for marking the buildings would be developed for submission to the Fine Arts Commission for consideration. We also plan to send you a list of the other agencies in Washington responsible for Government buildings, in order that you may suggest to them that they cooperate with us in the over-all project of suitably marking the Federal Buildings.

RECEIVED
THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
WASHINGTON, D. C.
MAY 7 1956

We will be in touch with you further as our study progresses.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Fred S. Poorman

Commissioner of Public Buildings

NOTED

cc: Mr. [illegible]
Secretary, Fine Arts Commission

Exhibit B

OLIVER P. BOLTON
11TH DISTRICT, OHIO

COMMITTEES:
BANKING AND CURRENCY
HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D. C.

June 14, 1956.

Mr. Linton R. Wilson,
Commission on Fine Arts,
Interior Department Building.
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr Wilson:

I just wanted to drop you a note saying how much I appreciated the consideration given to me by the members of the Fine Arts Commission in connection with my proposal to obtain markings for Federal Buildings in Washington. I feel that the Commission's approval of the designs worked out by the Public Buildings service will not only be in keeping with the esthetic beauty of the buildings but will go a long way toward enabling visitors to identify the various Federal Buildings.

Please convey my best wishes and appreciation to the members of the Commission for their consideration.

With all good wishes.

Ever sincerely,

Oliver P. Bolton,
Representative to Congress,
11th District, Ohio.

OPB/fe

RECEIVED
THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
WASHINGTON, D. C.
JUN 18 1956

NOTED

Exhibit C

May 11, 1956

Dear Mr. McLaughlin:

At a meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts held on May 9 and 10, 1956, the members noted that public hearings will be held by the District Commissioners on May 14, 1956, on the Webb & Knapp proposal for the Urban Renewal Plan of S outhwest Washington. The development of this Plan is, of course, a matter of the greatest interest to the members of the Commission of Fine Arts whose responsibilities extend, by virtue of the enabling Act and various Executive Orders, to matters which affect, in an important way, the appearance of the City of Washington. While no formal request has been made for the opinion of the Commission of Fine Arts in this matter, the members have expressed their views informally on several occasions to the representatives of Webb & Knapp. They have asked me to forward to you, for inclusion in the record, the following comments which they would like to make on the proposed Plan:

1. In general, the proposed Plan does not conform to and becomes competitive with the L'Enfant Plan and the pattern it established for the development of the Federal City.

2. No significant, comprehensive plan can be wholly successful that does not require the reorganization of the railroad tracks and the removal of the Federal warehouse.

3. Office buildings on the scale indicated would not be in harmony with the architectural development of the City.

4. Unless a scheme of this character is the best achievable, and unless it is carried out in its entirety, it may prove to be more harmful than beneficial, to the development of the City.

We hope these matters may be taken into consideration by you and others responsible for carrying out the proposed Plan for the development of the City of Washington.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Sincerely yours,

David E. Finley, Chairman

Honorable Robert E. McLaughlin
President
Board of Commissioners for the
District of Columbia
Washington, D. C.

Exhibit D

copy